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AUTHOR Holm, James N.
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ABSTRACT

The author discusses both what a consultant does and how one goes about getting a job as a communication consultant in business and industry. The four duties of the consultant include (1) analysis or diagnosis of the clients' problems; (2) prescription of a training design or corrective measures for these problems; (3) implementation or teaching of these strategies; and (4) evaluation of these activities in relation to their success. The author concludes by drawing upon his own experiences to illustrate the avenues leading to jobs as a communication consultant. (Author/LG)

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HOW TO GET STARTED AS A CONSULTANT

James N. Holm
Kent State University

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When Bill Cash first asked me to take part in this program he wrote that he expected me to be the "voice of experience," or "sage" of the group. While I appreciate his generous sentiments, I'll have to disown them in part, for certainly I do not want to represent myself as a sage. At the same time it is true that I have been concerned with work in the field of business and professional speaking for nearly thirty years and what I say will comes from my own experience. But I cannot make any claims that what you will hear goes beyond that experience. But I certainly have made no survey except to briefly inquire of a few of my consultant colleagues how they have gone about getting their appointments.

Now the printed program says that I'm going to talk on How to Get Started as a Consultant. What I want to say on this occasion, however, deserves a re-titling, and so I will ask you to allow me to title the talk How to Get Jobs as a Consultant, because I think this is the topic in which you are really interested. And while I intend to hit that target, there are some tangential matters which I can't overlook, and so before I approach the target, and I promise to do so, let me take up two or three of the tangents.

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I think we need to first answer the question, What is a Consultant? If I may, I'll operationalize this question to phrase it, What Does a Consultant Do? Thus it may overlap the remarks of Dr. Sincoff later in the program, but I hope they will be illuminating, and I take it you came to this meeting for the maximum amount of illumination, so let's look at the answer to the question, What Does a Consultant Do?

To me, a consultant, first of all, diagnoses, understands, or translates the needs and problems of his clients. That is, he must understand exactly what they think they need to have done or need to do, so that he can translate their desires or needs into his own terminology, frame of reference, and capability. He must understand the client's problem or proposal as the client sees it; he must clearly know the client's objectives. Two experiences of mine may illustrate something of the range of effort in this kind of operation. The first occurred a number of years ago when a representative of a large manufacturing firm called on me and wanted help with a specific training problem. The needs and objectives as described were clear and definite, they made sense to me, and I was able to accept his description as an accurate diagnosis and statement of need. Subsequent work was based on the diagnosis, and apparently the company was well satisfied with the outcome. More recently, however, I was called to assist in consulting with a firm engaged nationally in a professional service. The objectives of the people in this firm were perfectly clear

to them - at least as far as the final outcome was concerned, but were definitely obscure to us. Furthermore, we had to effect a break-down of their operation into a series of stages and to identify the commication behaviors which took place in each stage before we could isolate the several goals. On this occasion we had to translate and analyze carefully, checking with the client at every step, the total process involving a series of conferences over a period of at least three months, whereas my work in the first instance consumed possibly two weeks and I met with the client only two or three times before we were ready to move ahead.

The second thing which a consultant may do, and which was implicit in the discussion of the first, is to recommend measures to deal with the problem or need as analyzed. In both cases cited, the recommendation involved a design for training, even though that training in one case was quite different from that in the other. But the consultant may recommend a survey, further research, or some course of action not involving training.

Thirdly, the consultant may teach or instruct, playing the role he would normally play in a university classroom, but adapting his techniques and methods to the particular outcomes and the unique nature of the students involved. This is often, in fact, a challenging opportunity for the consultant, for he meets in the business or industrial field an entirely different sort of student from that which he

normally confronts in the university classroom. This level of activity may also call upon the consultant to complete a survey or study, to carry on research, to interview or counsel a variety of persons, or to do other things involved in his recommendations.

Finally, the consultant may be called upon to evaluate or measure the outcomes of his activities, to determine how successful he or the operation has been. In those situations in which an evaluation is not required by the client, the consultant will surely want to conduct a self-evaluation of what he has done in order to determine in his own mind the degree to which he has been successful.

These, then, are the four things a consultant may or must do: analyze or diagnose, design or prescribe, teach or implement, and evaluate. Each assignment may call upon him to one, all, or some combination of the four.

Having some idea of what a consultant does, let us now ask the second tangential question, namely, Why Be a Consultant? Before you undertake anything of this kind, I think you should examine your motives with full honesty. You need to ask yourself why you would like to do this thing, and to give yourself a sincere answer.

Within my experience there are three basic and acceptable reasons why anyone might want to be a consultant. The first of these, obviously, is money. This is the stuff which makes the mare go, it is perfectly legitimate, and I think that each of us must be honest about it and

say that we want to earn more than we do on the university campus. Money alone, however, is not a completely satisfactory answer, because the love of money can sometimes lead to disastrous consequences. Of equal importance, then, is the satisfaction, the self-esteem, the downright pride which may come from doing a good job as a consultant. It seems to me that frequently in one's mind are questions like: "Can I do this?" "Can I make theory work in practice?" "Can I take the things which I have been teaching on a theoretical level in a classroom and show that they work satisfactorily out where the action is?" There is a deep and abiding satisfaction to be dervied from learning that one can do the job and the the theory really works. There is a sense of personal worth which stems from finding that those who teach can also "do!" Beyond this is the third affirmative reason for consulting, and that is that it provides an opportunity to learn. What <u>are</u> the communication needs of people in business and industry? Under what conditions may theories work or not work? What principles are important to teach and what are unimportant? What theories or principles do those in industry use, and can they be integrated into the classroom situation? These are questions which a person closeted behind the wall of a university, ivy-covered or not, is in no position to answer. To get off the campus and out where the wheels turn is to discover the real needs, demands, and problems, and the really necessary skills, attitudes, and understandings. Such discoveries allow the consultant to return to his own campus prepared to do a better job with his undergraduate and even his graduate students.

If I am honest with myself, I think that I went into the business partly because the added money looked good, but also to gain self-satisfaction and to learn things which I thought would be useful. A person interested in business, industrial, and professional speech communication must know what goes on in the professional and industrial world.

There is a fourth reason why come people might go into the business of consulting, but I think it a negative and potentially destructive one. Such people seek ego-enchancement in the nature of superiority, increased status, command, or power. These are people on the professional "make." Even the shadow of such a motive should be disowned, for the task of a consultant is to serve others and not to enlarge his personal image.

Having disposed of the preliminaries, we can now advance directly upon the main question, namely How does one get a job as a consultant? Here, emphatically, I must speak from experience, and not from any survey or statistical account.

The first most important way in which jobs are generated is, to me, that they are a by-product of the individual's interest in good speech communication and of his concern for the application of his knowledge and skill to the needs and problems of those in business and industry. It seems to me that just as one cannot achieve happiness by a direct and head-on chase, or even approach it directly, neither will he be likely to get assignments as a consultant by chasing them. Happiness seems to come as a consequent of other

concerns, and like it, job inquiries first appear as a result of professional concern in a specific area.

I founded and for twenty years directed in one way or another Kent State University's annual Conference on Communication in Business and Industry. I was also one of the founders of the Business and Professional Speaking Interest Group of the old Speech Association of America. These facts bespeak an interest in and concern for effective communication in the business and industrial setting. As a result of this interest, I became known in the overlapping world as one who tried to translate his professional interests into applications in the service of others. Out of this awareness came some of the inquiries and the jobs which I accepted with various business and industrial concerns. Jobs like these are not always quick to come, and indeed a few may develop extremely slowly. For instance, four or five years ago I fell into conversation at one of our Conferences with a representative of one of the divisions of one of the largest industrial firms in the country who suggested that I might be of help in one of their programs at a near-by plant. Only this year has the contact which was initiated that long ago bourne fruit, and I will this Spring go to work on the assignment. That assignment, like so many I have had, was simply the by-product of an active interest in business and professional communication.

Jobs, in the second place, may come from some of your colleagues who need help of one kind or another. My affiliation with the professional service organization which I mentioned a few minutes ago developed out of

the contacts made by one of my colleagues who had been active in the Cleveland area. His was the initial contact with the firm, but he felt he needed assistance because the task was more than one man could handle, and required a variety of professional skills. As a result he recruited both me and a member of the psychology staff of his own college. We three teamed together to provide the assistance needed by the firm. Similarly, I did some work a few years ago for a major rubber company because a friend of mine who had been working for them felt it necessary to lighten his load and suggested me as a replacement.

Jobs and extra money may come, thirdly, from the simple process of making speeches. This is one way of widening one's circle of acquaintanceship, and one thing may lead to another. For example, I had been impressed by the husband and wife team of Harvey and Bonaro Overstreet, who not only wrote books as a team, but also made speeches as a team. On one occasion I was invited to speak on business communication to a near-by service club, and with the approval of the club, my wife and I applied the team-speech technique of the Overstreets to the occasion. In consequence, we were invited to make that or similar talks to other audiences, including the entire management of a near-by manufacturing concern. Reversing directions, my work with a rubber company led to several speeches before chapters of a sales executives club, which in turn led to other contracts. That effort which begins as a service to some group or audience creates widening circles of influence, and may end up as a profitable endeavor.

The first three avenues to a job lead to the fourth, which is that assignments sometimes stem from the recommendations of colleagues who suggest your name to business or industrial people. Thus, someone recommended me to a large utility a few years back, and someone else gave my name to the state's major oil industry. In each case all I know is that I was recommended, and I haven't the slightest idea of whom to thank. Had I not been fortunate enough to develop a widening circle of professional friends who were aware of my interests, I am sure that these two clients would not have been available.

Finally, some jobs may come by the process I will call "search and sell." By this I mean simply advertising one's services or calling on possible clients with the idea of discovering possible jobs. I have never had time to try this, and I'm sure it would present real problems for one without consulting experience. Yet I think it would work for someone with high ethical and professional standards who had established some reputation in the field. A good friend created an organization to serve the communication needs of firms in the Cleveland area and I'm sure the organization was as successful as its members found time to make it. Generating contacts by the "search and sell" method would probably take more time than the average full-time teacher could devote to it.

In general, the first four of the five methods is a way to get started in the business of being a consultant. I do not think it a career which can be hurried, but if you are not in a hurry and

can become known as one who is concerned with good speech communication in the business community, you are apt to find inquiries coming your way which may be turned into contracts.

Let me conclude by reminding you of certain fundamental premises which are, to my mind, indispensable to any professional consultant. The first of these is that a consultant must know his stuff. Mark Knapp has talked to you about what a consultant needs to know, and so I will simply emphasize the fact that you cannot afford to pretend to more than you are or know. Conversely, you owe it to yourself as well as to others to recognize what you don't know. The beginning of wisdom may be an awareness of your limitations and an equal awareness of exactly what those limitations are. The second premise is that you must serve with integrity; you cannot over-promise results nor pretend an ability to deliver goods about which there may be the slightest doubt. You owe an allegiance to the firm or organization which employs you, and you must dedicate your entire effort to its best interests. The final premise is that you will strive to learn as you go about the task of consulting. Business and industry are a world totally unlike the world of education - there are new vocabularies, new ways of looking at things, new systems of priorities, and a constantly changing enviornment in which communication takes place. There is much to be learned, and the consultant stands in an excellent position to gather and use available knowledge.

If your motivation is sound, if you can accept the fundamental

premises, and if you have shown yourself to be concerned for the lightening will strike and wait. Be available.